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David Braaten:

Spying Among Gentlemen

"Gentlemen do not read each other's mail," said the secretary of state, as he cut off funds for his primitive decoding section.

"I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people," said a successor 40 years later, as he allotted \$8 million for his civilized "destabilizing" section.

THE DIFFERENCE, in both style and character, between Henry Stimson, a gentleman of the old school (Yale '88), and Henry Kissinger, an international hardhat of the new school (Harvard '50), shows how far we have progressed in matters of national sophistication since the laughably naive days of 1930.

Poor Stimson, with his funny, antiquated notions, probably thought secretaries of state shouldn't lie to congressional committees, either. No wonder he never won a Nobel Prize.

Fortunately for the nation's survival, Stimson's archaic code of conduct was circumvented successfully, and Uncle Sam's cryptographers eventually cracked the Japanese Purple Code. This gave our leaders advance warning of the 1941 sneak attack plans, enabling them to disperse the fleet at Pearl Harbor, as we all remember.

THAT FAILURE to profit from a hot espionage tip might be interpreted as demonstrating simply that gentlemen don't know what to do with information they get when they do read other people's mail. But the record shows that this same lack of appreciation held true for non-gentlemen as well: Stalin ignored the precise warning of the Nazi invasion provided by his master spy, Richard Sorge, and three years later Hitler ignored similarly authentic information on D-Day supplied by HIS super-snoop, Cicero.

All of which raised the question in the espionage community: Why should we stand by and watch our agents' good work go to waste due to the stupidity of our leaders?

The answer was obvious — we shouldn't — and the remedy was simple: Take the uncertainty out of spying by turning mere intelligence gatherers into self-fulfilling prophets.

THUS WAS BORN the activist spook, whose wondrous enthusiasm has applied blowtorches to the postwar world's tinderboxes from Latin America to the Middle East and beyond.

Is there a government in danger of toppling? Washington demands to know, so the enterprising CIA eliminates guesswork by financing the overthrow. Given time and a big enough budget, there's hardly an intelligence estimate in all of Langley that can't be made to come true.

The fact that irresponsible people, in the Kissingerian sense, always seem to wind up under a repressive, corrupt dictator after the CIA gets through is something only tedious, moralizing bleeding hearts need to worry about. The response to such carping was provided by President Ford at his press conference: A) We do it for their own good, and B) the dirty Communists spend even more on destabilization than we do.

IF A JUNTA loses control and war breaks out or a decent man is assassinated, the squeamish should console themselves with the aphorism popularized by Robespierre and cited with approval by every social tinkerer since: "You can't make an omelet without cracking eggs."

And they should forget, as Robespierre did, that when you crack eggs you don't always get an omelet; sometimes you just get egg on your face.

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